

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 15, 2026

Bill SB 302 Opponent

Name: Amy Ashlock

Title: Kansas taxpayer and parent

Email: akashlock@gmail.com

Chair & Members of the Committee:

I'm writing to voice my opposition to bill SB 302. This places an undue burden on schools, and wastes taxpayer money, including the cost of implementation and monitoring. The decision on cell phone policies should be made at the local school district level, not a statewide mandate.

From my years of experience volunteering in the classroom, as well as a parent of two daughters in the Kansas public school system, I do not believe cell phones are what causes behavioral and distraction issues in the classroom. In fact, I have rarely heard from educators, nor have I directly witnessed, that there are pervasive disruptions in the classroom caused by cell phones. Instead, disruptions tend to be from behavioral issues like excessive talking or refusal to follow educator instructions.

Instead of spending taxpayer money on installing cell phone lockers and paying staff to monitor cell phone check ins and outs, one idea may be to address the real issue and use the tax dollars for local school districts to educate parents through a voluntary program on how to set expectations and boundaries for students. This will have much longer and wider benefits, both in the classroom and out.

Please vote no on bill SB 302 and leave this policy decision in the hand of districts.

Regards,
Amy Ashlock
Lenexa, KS

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 13, 2026

Bill SB 302 Opponent

Elizabeth Ault, parent, teacher in SMSD

ault.elizabeth@gmail.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I'm writing to voice my opposition to SB 302.

As an ESL teacher with 13 years of experience in the Shawnee Mission School District, I work daily with students who rely on technology to bridge language barriers and connect with their families. A blanket cell phone ban at the state level would create serious problems for our most vulnerable students.

This bill is classist. Students from under-resourced families often depend on personal devices because their schools lack sufficient technology. Wealthier districts can provide translation tools, tablets, and robust communication systems—but many of my students use their phones as their primary access to educational technology, translation apps, and communication with parents who speak limited English.

This bill promotes segregation. When my English learners can't access translation tools or communicate with their families during the school day, it deepens their isolation. They lose the ability to quickly clarify instructions, access multilingual learning resources, or reach family members who can help them navigate school challenges.

This bill does not help learners. My students use their phones for dictionary apps, Google Translate, and accessing the internet when the filters take away all options. These tools are essential scaffolds for their academic success. Taking them away doesn't eliminate distractions—it eliminates access.

Most troubling, this bill includes no exemptions for health and safety. What happens when a student needs to contact a parent about medication? When a family emergency arises? When parents who speak limited English need to communicate urgent information? Denying students this connection is dangerous and unconscionable.

Districts should have the flexibility to create phone policies that work for their communities. Please vote no on SB 302 and trust local educators and families to make decisions that serve their students' best interests.

Elizabeth Ault

TESTIMONY TO SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

From: Lisa Larson-Bunnell, Parent of a middle-school child, concerned citizen, and local attorney of Shawnee, KS / USD 232 DeSoto School District

Email: llb4shawnee@gmail.com

Bill Number: Bill SB 302

OPPONENT

Written testimony only

Date of hearing: January 15, 2026

Dear Chair Erickson and members of the committee,

I am writing to express my concern with the proposed legislation banning the use of cell phones in schools. I had a chance to review the proposal and have several concerns that I have listed below. This is not an exhaustive list.

- 1) **These are matters that are best managed locally.** Our school districts across the state have wildly diverse needs and these matters are best managed by local school administrations and school boards. Additionally, this proposed legislation goes against the Kansas Board of Education who recommended local school boards should address this issue.
- 2) **The data relied on to support this bill is not dependable or reproducible.** A good study on this issue would identify schools who had declining metrics that they believe were tied to the use of cell phones. The study would then have an intervention narrowly tailored to the issue, a timeframe for which the intervention was deployed, and the same data measured after the intervention. It would also be honest about other factors that could have led to the improved metrics. The current studies I have seen lack scientific rigor or reproducibility. The proposed ban is heavy handed and the equivalent of using a hammer when a screwdriver is needed. This level of state-wide interference is not supported by reliable data.
- 3) **The definition of “instructional time” is overly broad.** Time between classes and during lunch hours is not instructional time. The use of this phrase is misleading. If the purpose of the bell-to-bell ban, which is what it should be called, is to prevent cyber bullying, please know that cyber-bullying is a 24/7 risk. We all need to ask ourselves, “what is wrong with students using phones to communicate between classes and at lunch?”

4) The definition of “personal electronic communication device” is overly broad.

Most people who hear about this bill will not envision that this legislation goes well beyond cell phones. The definition is overly broad and includes ANY device such as cell phones, tablets, computers, watches, wireless headphones, and any other device that has the capability to call or generate text (written) communications. I am not only concerned that this includes devices for which there are legitimate uses during the school day, but also that our technological landscape is such that this definition will be outdated as soon as they are published. Technological advancements are too fast, and many of these devices could be beneficial as current or future teaching tools.

5) The carve out for 504 plans and medical needs clearly demonstrates legitimate uses for these devices during the school day, yet those uses will be limited to students who will now face stigma for having access to a phone. Aside from the social stigma, this bill presupposes that all students that could benefit from a 504 plan have one, and that students have easy access to healthcare providers. We know both of those things are not true and these carve outs are not broad enough to support all legitimate uses.

I am also not sure that the current carve-outs do enough to allow schools to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”). The ADA requires schools to provide reasonable accommodations for those with disabilities. For instance, a student who is partially hearing impaired may rely on commercially available earbuds and a cell phone as a hearing assistive device. This is more common now that the federal hearing aid regulations have loosened. Does someone who has been hearing impaired since birth now need to go to a doctor and get a new note to permit this? My reading of the current legislation suggests yes. This need for a new, explicit note would be a violation of the ADA since the school district was aware of the hearing disability.

6) Social control vs. teaching responsible use of technology. A cell phone ban in schools is like trying to stop a storm by closing the windows. It might reduce the immediate disruption inside the room, but it does not address the weather outside or teach anyone how to navigate it. Phones, like weather, are a constant reality. Students will face them everywhere beyond school walls. Instead of pretending the storm is not there, schools are better off teaching students how to read the forecast,

carry an umbrella, and know when to seek shelter, developing judgment, self-control, and resilience rather than relying on temporary cover.

- 7) **Last line of defense.** While cell phones can be used for nefarious purposes such as cyber bullying, they are also often the last line of defense for our kids and are used to catch not only juvenile, but adult offenders in our schools. I am sure this committee is familiar with the April 2021 incident involving a substitute teacher who was caught by a student's cell phone making a series of bizarre speeches and kicking a male student in the groin and encouraging other students to do likewise. Imagine if these behaviors were not recorded. How likely do you think it would be that the offender would have been held accountable without the video evidence. It is more likely that they would have been permitted to continue teaching. The legislation offering a phone at the school where kids can call their parents is not an adequate substitute.
- 8) **This ban can exacerbate the school to prison pipeline.** I fully admit that this will affect a minority of students, but it can have a devastating impact. Here is how it would work. A student commits a crime for which the court places them on probation. That is, they can avoid incarceration if they meet the obligations set forth by the judge for probation. The conditions for probation are statutory and found in K.S.A. §3823.01 et sec. For the sake of this illustration, assume the crime was not a major felony such as murder or assault (sexual or otherwise). The student later gets caught with a cell phone prompting a visit to the principal's office or with the school's disciplinary officer. It is a statutory condition of probation that the kid have no disciplinary issues at school to keep them out of jail. It is also a condition that all referrals for discipline be reported to the probation officer and the court. These communications are often made by School Resource Officers. So, now that cell phone possession has turned into a probation violation and the judge is fully within their rights to revoke the probation and incarcerate the student. This is not hypothetical, this is how our system works. There is variation from county to county on how these violations will be enforced. Some courts will treat this as a "technical violation" indicating that probation should not be revoked. But judges are not required to treat it as such. It is an uncomfortable truth that our (not just Kansas) criminal justice system is not always fair or logical. Possessing a cell phone in school should never lead to someone being stripped of their freedom, even if doing so is a technical violation of an overly broad probation structure that is not narrowly tailored to protect the public's interests.

To be clear, I am not opposed to all cell phone bans, but I request that they be narrowly tailored and respond to the specific needs of our students. That is, they are best managed at the local level. Please do not allow this legislation out of committee in its current form.

Respectfully Submitted on January 14, 2026, to S.education@senate.ks.gov

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 15, 2026

Bill SB 302 Opponent

Lauren Campbell, parent and teacher in the Shawnee Mission School District

Laurencampbell@smsd.org

Chair & Members of the Committee,

Hello, I'm writing to voice my opposition to bill SB 302.

Our school district vehemently supports reducing the cell phone usage of our students and this is why we enacted a formal board policy to address that last year. As a teacher and parent, I shared my support of the policy which does not allow use during instructional time, but does allow teachers the freedom to determine how it will apply in class. For example, in my classroom students must leave phones in backpacks and they should not be seen. But other classrooms provide cubbies or pocket charts for storage. I also have the instructional freedom to have students retrieve phones if I am asking them to make videos, or complete surveys or activities which include QR codes. This bill would limit the autonomy of teachers and local authorities. As a parent with children in the United States, I know there is always the horrible possibility of a shooting but the knowledge that my daughters could call for help or text, even if they're in a location without access to a landline makes me feel a modicum of comfort in the face of that terror.

As a parent, teacher, and resident in this state I am asking you to please vote no on bill SB 302.

Lauren Campbell
Parent & Teacher
Overland Park

January 14, 2026

Bill SB 302 Opponent
Christie Carter - parent
ctant@mac.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my opposition to bill SB 302. My student attends the Shawnee Mission School District where they already have a cell phone policy in place that is working. Mandating this statewide takes away each school district's ability to do what is best for their student population. Additionally, It adds unplanned cost to the district to supply the storage for phones.

In conclusion, please vote no on bill SB 302.

Christie Carter
Parent
Overland Park, KS



Opposition Testimony on Senate Bill 302

Submitted by: Gillian Chapman, Superintendent, Blue Valley School District
Date: January 13, 2026

Chairperson Erickson and Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 302. On behalf of the Blue Valley School District, I submit testimony in opposition to SB302 as drafted. We share the Legislature's concerns about personal device use during instructional time, which is why our district already prohibits such use. If SB 302 advances, we respectfully propose the amendments outlined in this testimony to strengthen the bill.

Existing District Policies and Practices

Blue Valley School District has already taken proactive, comprehensive steps to address student device use and communication practices:

- The district has adopted a personal device policy that prohibits student use of personal devices during instructional time in all schools.
- This policy was developed through a collaborative process involving students, staff, families, and the Board, with the explicit goal of protecting instructional time and eliminating distractions. This level of buy-in has ensured successful implementation of the policy.
- Blue Valley maintains policies that prohibit staff from communicating with students via social media.
- The district provides approved, secure educational platforms for staff-to-student communication to support instruction while maintaining appropriate boundaries.

Because these procedures and safeguards are already in place, SB 302 is not necessary for Blue Valley School District, and we are concerned about the bill's potential to impose unfunded mandates on school districts and erode the authority of local school boards to make decisions in the best interest of their community, for whom they were elected to serve. Several elements of

the current draft carry clear fiscal and operational impacts without corresponding funding or demonstrated need.

Opposition to Unfunded Mandates

Blue Valley School District opposes legislation that creates statewide mandates without funding, particularly when districts already have effective local policies in place. Portions of SB 302 would require additional staff time, monitoring, compliance tracking, and potentially infrastructure investments on behalf of more than 12,000 secondary students; costs that would be borne entirely by local school districts.

Support for Local Control

Each school district in Kansas represents the values and beliefs of its community; therefore, the needs of children are best met by those closest to the decision. Blue Valley has a policy in place that was suggested and drafted in a collaborative process and adopted by the local school board, which has the authority to make policy and enforce policy.

Suggested Revisions to Strengthen the Bill

If the Legislature chooses to advance SB 302, we respectfully recommend the following amendments:

1. Lines 17–22: Eliminate These Provisions

These provisions would be challenging to monitor and enforce and would divert teacher attention away from instruction if educators are expected to inspect devices or ensure they are powered off or stored in an “inaccessible location.”

Additionally, the requirement for an “inaccessible location” effectively mandates that school districts provide storage solutions, creating:

- Additional costs
- Liability for loss or damage
- Responsibility for monitoring and securing personal property

This is an unnecessary and burdensome provision.

2. Lines 20–22: Eliminate

School districts do not authorize children to possess personal communication devices. Decisions regarding whether a child owns or brings a device to school are made by parents or guardians.

Authorizing or prohibiting device possession exceeds district authority and does not need to be addressed in statute. This provision is unnecessary and should be removed.

3. Lines 23–24: Eliminate

School districts already maintain established procedures for violations of school rules. Explicitly outlining disciplinary responses in statute or board policy is redundant and unnecessary, as these procedures already exist and are governed locally.

4. Page 2, Lines 7–14: Revise the Definition of “Instructional Time”

The bill’s definition of instructional time is not consistent with how districts are required to record instructional minutes for the State of Kansas.

Passing periods, breakfast, lunch, recess, and breaks do not count as instructional minutes under state reporting requirements. Any statutory definition should align precisely with existing state instructional time requirements to avoid confusion and compliance conflicts.

Recommended Amendment: Age-Gating Social Media Access to Age 16

While SB 302 focuses on device use during the school day, Blue Valley School District believes the Legislature could make a more meaningful and impactful contribution to student well-being by addressing social media access itself. This is an area for which local control can not impact. Local school boards do not have the authority to initiate age gating and would require the authority of the legislature to accomplish.

Proposed Amendment

We recommend amending SB 302 to include provisions that restrict access to social media platforms for children under the age of 16, commonly referred to as “age gating”.

Rationale

- Research and school-based experience consistently demonstrate that social media significantly contributes to distraction, anxiety, and behavioral challenges among adolescents.
- Schools are frequently asked to manage the downstream effects of social media use such as conflicts, harassment, and mental health concerns, despite having no authority over platform access.
- Age gating places responsibility where it belongs: on platforms and regulatory frameworks, rather than on schools during instructional hours.

An age-based approach would:

- Support student mental health and focus
- Reduce pressure on schools to police personal technology
- Address the root cause of many school-based distractions rather than symptoms

Conclusion

Blue Valley School District appreciates the Legislature's interest in protecting instructional time and student well-being. However, SB 302 as currently drafted is unnecessary for districts with existing policies, creates unfunded mandates, erodes local control, and includes provisions that are operationally impractical.

If the bill moves forward, we strongly urge the committee to:

- Remove redundant and burdensome provisions
- Align definitions with existing state requirements
- Consider meaningful amendments such as age gating social media access to age 16

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,
Gillian Chapman, Superintendent
Blue Valley School District

gkchapman@bluevalleyk12.org

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 15, 2026

Bill SB 302 Opponent

Amanda Chappell, Concerned Parent

Mandichappell@yahoo.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I am writing to you today to express my opposition to bill SB 302.

We support the work of local school districts in limiting student cell phone usage during instruction time. Just like our state policies should be set by our elected state legislators and not federal government; school policies should be determined by locally elected school boards and administrators, not state legislators. This ensures local stakeholders—parents, teachers, and students—have an appropriate voice in shaping policies that work for their district and allows for policy changes as needs arise.

Additionally, the logistical challenges the bill would create of securely collecting, storing, and distributing phones each day and the potential costs this would create for school districts are further reason to oppose this bill. The bills create an unfunded mandate as they provide no additional funding for schools though the bills suggest utilizing equipment such as secure lockable pouches or a phone locker which could create a large expense when multiplied across district buildings. All of this at a time when our school districts are already facing funding shortfalls; any additional funding that could potentially be secured needs to be put directly towards instruction via teachers, resources, aids, etc.

In summary, this bill is not fully thought out, takes away the will of the voters who elected our local school board officials to make policy decisions for our schools, and needs to be opposed. Please vote no on bill SB 302.

Sincerely,

Amanda Chappell

Prairie Village, KS 66208

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Education

NAME: Colleen Cunningham

TITLE: Kansas Parent & Former Teacher

EMAIL ADDRESS: colleen@demod.com

BILL NUMBER: Bill SB 302

PROPONENT, OPPONENT, or NEUTRAL: Opponent

ORAL or WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY: Written Only

DATE OF HEARING: January 15, 2026

Chair Erickson & Members of the Committee,

I am writing today as a Kansas parent, as well as a former teacher, and am asking you to vote NO on SB302.

Mandating that cell phones be “securely stored away from the student’s person” presents both logistical and financial challenges for schools. Our neighborhood public high school has around 1500 students, and most students do not have access to lockers. If this bill were to be implemented, students would spend a large amount of time waiting in line at the beginning and end of the day to turn in and retrieve their phones. For students who leave for appointments or lunch or off-campus classes, during the day, they would be forced to wait for staff to be available to retrieve their phone before leaving. Kansas public schools are already insufficiently funded to provide what is currently expected of them. Demanding that they provide secure storage without an appropriate increase in funding is not prudent.

The current reality is that local school districts already can, and have, put cell phone bans in place which reflect their community’s needs, with input from local stakeholders. Our family’s school district put a cell phone ban into place at the start of this school year. It has rules that vary, and are developmentally appropriate, by grade level, allowing 18-year-old high school seniors more freedom than 6th graders, for example. SB302 does not acknowledge differing developmental and logistical needs of students. When we attended Back to School Night at our kids’ middle and high schools, administrators and teachers across the board were very positive about our district’s then-new technology policy. School boards across the state, whose constituents have demanded a technology policy, have put such a policy into place. Those who haven’t are free to do so, if their community requests it. This is most appropriately addressed by local school boards.

Finally, I share concerns regarding increases in anxiety disorders, depression and suicide among Kansas youth, and do advocacy work on these issues. I have a young family member who struggles with such an anxiety disorder, and having their cell phone accessible at school is one of the few things that decreases their anxiety to a level that they are able to attend school at all. This has been a godsend at times when they can feel a panic attack coming on, and staff members are not available, or sufficiently educated on topics related to mental health, to support them at that time. Instead, they are able to send me a text that they are struggling, and I can talk them through it, which allows them to return to learning more quickly, or at least makes them less distracting to peers. While SB302 allows for students with a 504 Plan to have an exception to the required safe storage, having a 504 Plan requires: adults who recognize symptoms of issues that fall under the guidelines of a 504 Plan and are willing to acknowledge the severity of symptoms, IF their child is willing to disclose symptoms; a physician or other medical professional who can recognize such a

disorder; multiple meetings and paperwork done by school administrators and parents; and communication (which often discloses their disability) to all teachers, every semester, that this exception exists in their 504 Plan. I know that there are students in my kids' schools who are missing one or more of the pieces needed to access the exception in this bill, and who will be unable to comfortably attend school without the exception. Rather than this legislation to address student mental health and suicide, it would be far more effective for the legislature to fully fund our public schools, including special education, so that they can increase mental health supports; provide increased funding to public health service organizations which address mental health; pass safe firearm storage bills, as 46% of all gun deaths among children and teens in Kansas are suicides (compared with 29% nationally), and research shows that the firearms used in these suicides and suicide attempts are most often accessed while unsecured from a friend or family member's home. Rather than helping student mental health, this legislation will have a negative impact on students who are already managing mental illness.

I appreciate your time and attention regarding SB302 and would again urge you to vote NO.

Colleen Cunningham
Overland Park

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 15, 2026

Bill SB 302 Opponent

Lisa Feingold, parent of public school graduate, public middle school employee
lfineau@hotmail.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I am writing today to document my opposition to bill SB 302.

The great cell phone debate is not new. As a parent and person employed in a public school building for 16 years, I am extremely familiar with all sides and perspectives concerning device use and abuse. I've attended all the concerned parent meetings, read all the books, examined statistics, and actively participated in policy and procedure development in my local district, often in the same room with many of the parents at the forefront of this bill's development. While proponents operate based on their experiences and anecdotes, I have a front row seat to how device use plays out daily for entire school populations, understanding many students and families are dealing with variables and challenges bell-to-bell parents do not factor into decision making because they choose to disregard life variables that are not their own, and most have that luxury. For example, for proponents, getting in touch with their student is a simple call to the office; if you are an English speaking individual with unlimited access to a phone, I suppose it is simple. If proponents could not reach their student, or communicate a shift in their day's plans, fits would be had, and positions would shift, which is why control of school-related district policy should remain local.

It cannot be lost on legislators that supporting SB 302 after implementing open enrollment/intrastate district transfer legislation in the interest of parental choice is a contradiction, as is calling for device bans in the best interest of all students while disregarding parental opposition to device bans.

Focusing on properly funding special education would allow resources to be dispersed back into areas that would support students and protect the learning environment more effectively than this piece of legislation.

Please vote no on bill SB 302.

Lisa Feingold
Merriam Resident



USD #377 - ATCHISON COUNTY COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

306 Main Street, PO Box 289
Effingham, Kansas 66023

Opposition Testimony of SB 302
For the Senate Education Committee
1/15/2026

Dr. Andrew K Gaddis
Superintendent of Schools, USD 377-Atchison County Community Schools

Chair Erickson and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 302. I provide this testimony as Superintendent of USD 377 – Atchison County Community Schools. While the intent of SB 302 is understood, the bill represents a significant departure from Kansas’s long-standing commitment to local control in public education.

Kansas has consistently affirmed that locally elected boards of education, in partnership with administrators, educators, and families, are best positioned to make decisions that serve their students and communities. Districts across the state vary widely in size, demographics, resources, and student needs. A statewide mandate banning cell phones removes the flexibility districts need to establish policies aligned with local values, building culture, and grade-level appropriateness.

USD 377, like many Kansas districts, has adopted locally developed cell phone expectations designed to support safe, orderly, and effective learning environments. These policies allow school leaders to respond to instructional needs, student safety considerations, and parent expectations while maintaining accountability. Senate Bill 302 would override these local decisions and replace them with a one-size-fits-all requirement that does not reflect the diverse realities of Kansas schools.

Preserving local authority allows districts to adjust practices as student needs change, technology evolves, and community input is considered—flexibility that cannot be achieved through statute. For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Senate Education Committee to oppose Senate Bill 302 and to uphold the principle of local control that has been foundational to the success of Kansas public education.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dr. Andrew K Gaddis". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a faint dotted line.

Dr. Andrew K Gaddis, Superintendent
USD 377 – Atchison County Community Schools

Office of the Superintendent of Schools

306 Main Street ~ Effingham, Kansas 66023 ~ (913) 833-5050

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 13, 2026

Bill SB 302 Opponent

Geoffrey Geist, KS Parent & Business Owner

Geoffrey.geist@gmail.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I'm writing to voice my opposition to bill SB 302.

School districts create policies as needed and in response to the needs of the families in their district. Your one-size-fits-few flex is unnecessary. Children with medical needs should not be cut off from their parents or their medical monitoring phone apps. Parents should have the opportunity to check on the wellbeing and location of their children when they see fit. Children should have the opportunity to call their parents or 911 during a school shooting – as children did in Uvalde.

Please vote no on bill SB 302.

Geoffrey Geist, KS Parent & Business Owner
Roeland Park, KS

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 13, 2026

Bill SB 302 Opponent

Michele Shea Geist, KS Parent & Business Owner

sheageist@gmail.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I'm writing to voice my opposition to bill SB 302.

Jesus Christ, don't you people have real problems to solve? I know I'm supposed to be nice but that doesn't seem to work with the KS legislature.

School districts create policies as needed and in response to the needs of the families in their district. Your one-size-fits-few flex is unnecessary. Children with medical needs should not be cut off from their parents or their medical monitoring phone apps. Parents should have the opportunity to check on the wellbeing and location of their children when they see fit. Children should have the opportunity to call their parents or 911 during a school shooting – as children did in Uvalde.

Please vote no on bill SB 302. Maybe work on the school shooting thing instead.

M. Shea Geist, KS Parent & Business Owner
Roeland Park, KS

COMMITTEE TESTIMONY

TO: Members of the Senate Education Committee

FROM: GR Gordon-Ross, Board President, USD 497 Lawrence Public Schools

SUBJECT: Testimony in Opposition to SB 302

DATE OF HEARING: January 15, 2026

Chair Erickson and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to SB 302 on behalf of the USD 497 Lawrence Public Schools Board of Education. As Board President, I affirm our district's commitment to fostering a focused and productive learning environment for all students. We recognize and support the fundamental intent of SB 302 to address the challenges that personal electronic communication devices can pose to instructional time and student engagement.

USD 497 has proactively addressed these concerns through our existing JCAA policy (<https://go.boarddocs.com/ks/usd497/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=DBPP36621734>) on "Cell Phones and Electronic Devices," adopted December 9, 2024. This policy already prohibits student use of personal electronic communication devices during instructional time or school hours and requires devices to be turned off and stored out of sight. It also includes clear exceptions for documented medical needs, IEPs, and 504 plans, and mechanisms for emergency contact. Our experience demonstrates that districts are well-equipped to implement effective policies that balance technological realities with educational priorities.

While we appreciate the intent of SB 302, we believe certain provisions could inadvertently limit local control, create unfunded mandates, or introduce ambiguity that could hinder effective school operations. For these reasons, USD 497 respectfully urges the Committee to reject SB 302 in its current form and consider the following concerns:

1. Definition of "Instructional Time" and Loss of Local Control:

SB 302, Section 1(c)(1), defines "Instructional time" broadly as "the time from the start of the school day until dismissal at the end of the school day on the school premises, including, but not limited to, in any classroom, structured or unstructured learning setting, recess, lunch or passing period."

Our existing policy provides building administration with discretion to permit or restrict cell phone use during non-instructional times, such as lunch and passing periods, particularly at the middle and high school levels. This flexibility allows schools to adapt to unique campus layouts, student needs, and supervision capacities, maintaining a balance between a device-free learning environment and appropriate student autonomy during breaks. The bill's encompassing definition would eliminate the community-informed local control established through policy developed alongside families, students, teachers, and building leaders—potentially leading to increased student frustration and enforcement challenges in non-instructional settings where device use can be managed appropriately by local building administrators. This removes the ability for local school boards to set policies that best serve their specific student populations and communities.

2. Physical Confiscation and Storage Requirements as a Potential Unfunded Mandate:

Section 1(a)(2) of SB 302 requires that all personal electronic communication devices be "turned off and securely stored away from the student's person in an inaccessible location during instructional time."

While USD 497 already requires devices to be "turned off and stored out of sight," the term "inaccessible location" could be interpreted to necessitate physical confiscation or the provision of secure storage solutions (e.g., lockers, pouches) for every student. Such an interpretation would constitute a significant unfunded mandate, imposing substantial logistical and financial burdens on school districts that currently manage device storage through less prescriptive means. Requiring expensive solutions like secured pouches, locked security storage, or similar items without corresponding state funding places an unreasonable burden on local budgets.

3. Ambiguity in Employee Social Media Communication and Impact on Essential District Tools:

Section 2(a) of SB 302 prohibits school employees from "privately or directly communicating with any student via a social media platform for official school purposes except as otherwise provided in subsection (b)." Section 2(c)(2) defines "Social media platform" broadly as "any online website, application, computer software or other internet medium that permits a person to become a registered user, establish an account or create a profile for the purpose of allowing the person to create, share and view user-generated content through such account or profile."

This broad definition of "social media platform," if interpreted strictly, could unintentionally encompass district-approved communication platforms vital for staff-student-family engagement, such as ParentSquare, or even general email services like Gmail. USD 497 utilizes ParentSquare to facilitate direct, official communication between staff, students, and families, with all interactions stored and monitored for review. Such tools are indispensable for timely alerts, academic support, and fostering a connected school community. The current language risks undermining these essential communication channels, thereby hindering effective and transparent communication with our school communities. We contend that the bill should explicitly carve out exceptions for official, district-sanctioned communication platforms that offer appropriate oversight and record-keeping.

4. Student and Family Sense of Control During Emergencies:

A strict, all-day prohibition on student access to personal devices, coupled with requirements for secure, inaccessible storage, raises concerns regarding student and family peace of mind during emergency situations. In the event of a school evacuation or lockdown, the traditional option of calling home from the school office phone may become unavailable or impractical. Students being completely separated from their personal devices, which for many are their primary means of immediate family contact, can lead to increased anxiety and a feeling of lost control for both students and their families. While the bill mentions school-provided communication devices for parent contact, it is critical that any policy accounts for how students can directly and quickly reach their families in active emergency scenarios when other channels are compromised. The current language of SB 302 does not adequately address this crucial aspect of safety and reassurance for our students and their families.

In conclusion, while USD 497 shares the goals of SB 302 to create a more focused learning environment, we believe its current provisions are overly prescriptive and detrimental to effective local school administration. Therefore, we respectfully urge the Committee to oppose Senate Bill No. 302 as currently written. Significant amendments would be necessary to protect local control, prevent unfunded mandates, clarify definitions to avoid unintended consequences for essential communication tools, and pragmatically address emergency communication needs.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

GR Gordon-Ross
Board President
USD 497 Lawrence Public Schools
gr.gordon-ross@usd497.org
785.813.1769

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Education

NAME: Ian Graves

TITLE: Kansas Parent

EMAIL ADDRESS: ian.graves@protonmail.com

BILL NUMBER: SB 302

PROPONENT, OPPONENT, or NEUTRAL: Opponent

ORAL or WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY: Written Only

DATE OF HEARING: January 15, 2026

Chair Erickson & Members of the Committee,

I'm writing in opposition to SB 302 as a Kansas parent. The bill, while well-intentioned, creates an unfunded mandate that is overly prescribed for local districts to implement. I was particularly disappointed to see Johnson County delegation members supporting this bill. Proponents will frequently cite pop science sources such as Jon Haidt's "The Anxious Generation" and similar works as the basis for a mandated bell-to-bell phone ban across the entire state. These works are, unfortunately, specious. The reality is that the data on phone and device use among young people is nuanced and not well understood – not a good lane for politicians in Topeka to occupy. This is an area where communities can self-regulate and exercise local control.

While phones generally do not belong in classrooms where focus is required, there are many instances of proper and healthy use of these devices among young people, families, and communities, and this bill throws the baby out with the bathwater. It creates an unfunded mandate and imposes harsher penalties on children in working families who use phones to stay in touch with their parents.

Moreover, I find arguments in favor of bans about the benefits to the mental health of young people to be highly suspect, considering the state continues to underfund our schools, SPED programs, and public health services that would prioritize mental health treatment. Give me a break.

Please oppose SB 302.

Ian Graves

Prairie Village

My name is Isabella Hermansen. I attended Olathe East High School in Olathe, KS from 2021-2025. I am now a college student at Kansas State University with a major in secondary education; social studies. My freshman year of high school, someone had brought a gun into my school and opened fire in the office, injuring multiple people and traumatizing hundreds. I feared for my life; thinking either me or my friends, peers, or teachers would be caught in the crossfire. Multiple students in my classroom were crying, frantically texting their families how scared they were. I needed to get ahold of my aunt in order to figure out what was going on, my teacher didn't tell me anything. As someone in college who will become a teacher, I am very against the phone bill. My first reason, is that students must have access to freely talk to their own family throughout the day. The strongest line of evidence is in the events that I have experienced; the possibility of going to school and never returning home. Gun violence happens every day in America, and schools are some of the main targets for these abhorrent acts. Imagine those countless kids that have tragically been shot to death in a classroom. Their bodies in a state of panic and shock, lying down on the same carpet their teacher reads to them on. Imagine how their parents would feel sending their kids off to school only for them to never hear their child laugh, or tell a story, or drive a car, get their license, get their first job, go on a first date, or graduate. Do you think those kids would have felt a little bit better if they had texted their parents what was going on at the time, or would they trust Dr. Brent Yeager, who sent an email to parents hours after the shooting had happened? My second argument is that group punishment does not solve the problem at hand. I was a good student, I had more A's than any other grade I received my entire time in school. One of my least favorite things was when my elementary teachers would cancel recess because of something I did not do. I have taken classes on how to be an effective teacher, I have even been in circumstances where I have shadowed and been a teacher aid since my Freshman year of high school. Not once was group punishment mentioned. If it was, it was seen in a negative light. This is because it doesn't work; collective punishment puts students against each other. They don't change the behavior, they grow to dislike those who misbehave. One might add, "if they don't get along with those who misbehave, won't that stop the action?" the answer is not always. No one can fully know what is going on in a student's home, maybe the student acts out on purpose because they are neglected at home, and it is the one way they get attention. Maybe misbehaving is a cry for help, that they need extra assistance from the teacher. Maybe they are neurodivergent and struggling, so they act out in order to receive attention. In my high school days, I was on my phone even though it was 'against the rules'. If I was done with all of my work, why wouldn't I be allowed to listen to music, or text my friends? Being on my phone in class didn't cause my grades to drop, if I understood something the teacher was teaching, I would feel bored listening to the teacher explain it for fifteen extra minutes. I wasn't distracting to other students by silently scrolling on my phone, because I was quiet and already not disruptive. If you think schools have a phone problem, going cold turkey isn't going to solve the problem, as going cold turkey seldom works in addiction recovery. I'm going to be nerdy and take a Jeffersonian stance; let the teachers figure out what works best for their classroom, how phone usage is in their classroom and adapt to it. If teachers have trust for their students and tell them to just put it in their pocket until their done with their work, if a teacher has phone caddy's for students to put their phone in everyday, if they have a strike system where they trust students until students have their phone out when they shouldn't. Phones should not be a state ruling decision, for the state isn't present

in every single classroom. The state does not know every single student by heart and name. If this bill passes, and phones are strictly banned in schools, I honestly could not predict how grades will turn out, but I know that students will be a riot after it passes. Students who were addicted to their phones could get angry, they could get headaches and migraines from a lack of their phones. The student who's grades were low because they were focused on snapchat instead of school might go up, but the student who relies on listening to music for serotonin because they have a hard time making friends, might feel more disconnected from the world. Please think about the words that I have said, as someone who has actually been in school and not someone who graduated high school before the invention of the cellphone. As someone who is going to school to be a teacher, and someone who knows about child development. Instead of someone who wants to control something that will have no effect on them. Even Machiavelli declared that a good leader is someone who is involved in all parts of their kingdom, not someone who is a Kansas Senator while having a house in Florida.

Thank you, Isabella Hermansen.

Jan. 12, 2026

Dear Members of the Kansas Legislature,

I am writing to provide written testimony in opposition to HB 2421 and SB302, which would require school districts to submit documentation regarding student screen time.

While I appreciate the Legislature's interest in student well-being and learning conditions, this bill represents an unnecessary layer of legislative oversight into matters that are already appropriately addressed at the local level. Decisions related to instructional practices, technology use, and student behavior are best made by local boards of education in partnership with educators, families, and community members who know their students and schools best.

In our district, we have already adopted and implemented a bell-to-bell cell phone policy. This policy is being followed and respected by staff, students, and parents alike. It has been effective without the need for additional reporting requirements or state-level monitoring. Our experience mirrors that of many Kansas school districts that have established local policies addressing screen use in ways that fit their communities.

Requiring districts to submit documentation on screen time would divert time and energy away from the core work of teaching and learning. School leaders and educators are already managing significant reporting and compliance responsibilities. Adding another mandate does not improve student outcomes and instead pulls attention away from more pressing needs.

If the Legislature wishes to focus its efforts on issues that would have a meaningful and immediate impact on Kansas students, fully funding special education remains a critical and unmet obligation. Addressing this long-standing challenge would provide direct support to students, families, and school districts across the state.

I respectfully urge you to oppose HB2421 and SB302 and to continue to honor the principle of local control that has long guided effective public education in Kansas. Local school districts are capable, responsible, and already taking appropriate action in this area.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Deena Hilbig
Superintendent, USD 327



USD 327 DISTRICT OFFICE

145 W 15th Street, PO BOX 306, Ellsworth, KS 67439

785-472-5561 | usd327.org

Subject: Written Testimony in Opposition to SB 302

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Education

NAME: Chris Huff

TITLE: Kansas Parent

EMAIL ADDRESS: chris@chris-huff.com

BILL NUMBER: SB 302

PROPONENT, OPPONENT, or NEUTRAL: Opponent

ORAL or WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY: Written Only

DATE OF HEARING: January 15, 2026

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

I am writing to respectfully oppose SB 302, which would mandate bell-to-bell personal device bans in all Kansas schools.

I want to be clear at the outset: I do **not** oppose schools restricting student phone use during instructional time. Many educators report that phones are disruptive, and the evidence supports that removing phones from classrooms can improve focus and learning conditions. Schools absolutely need the authority to manage their learning environments.

My concern is with a **statewide mandate** that treats bell-to-bell bans as a comprehensive solution to problems that extend far beyond the school day and beyond schools' realistic control.

The Blue Ribbon Task Force report that informs this bill devotes significant attention to youth mental health, anxiety, depression, sleep deprivation, social media harms, and long-term well-being. These are serious and real concerns — but they are driven primarily by **out-of-school behavior**, family norms, and platform-level incentives, not by what happens between first and last bell.

The research base shows a clear distinction that matters for policy:

- There is reasonably strong evidence that phones distract students and disrupt learning during class.
- There is **much weaker evidence** that banning phones at school, by itself, improves overall mental health, sleep, or long-term self-regulation.
- The best available studies suggest that when phones are restricted during school hours alone, students often compensate with increased use after school, leaving total screen exposure unchanged.

In other words, school bans may protect instructional time — which is important — but they are **not demonstrated mental-health interventions**, and they do not reliably teach students how to regulate technology use once the restriction is removed.

That distinction matters because SB 302 would impose a uniform mandate while implicitly promising outcomes it cannot deliver on its own.

I am also concerned about unintended long-term effects. Adolescence is a developmental period when self-regulation is still forming. Research consistently shows that durable self-control is learned through **scaffolding and gradual autonomy**, not through permanent external control alone. If students are never given structured opportunities to practice responsible use — paired with guidance, feedback, and parental alignment — we risk solving a short-term classroom problem while leaving students unprepared for environments like college and the workforce, where no such bans exist.

Finally, a statewide mandate places enforcement burdens on schools without guaranteeing the funding, staffing, or parent coordination necessary for success. Educators are right to want phones out of classrooms — but it is not reasonable to ask schools to carry sole responsibility for a problem that is largely societal and home-based.

For these reasons, I urge the Committee to reject SB 302 in its current form and instead:

- Preserve **local control** so districts can tailor policies to their communities.
- Frame school phone restrictions honestly as **learning-environment protections**, not cures for the youth mental health crisis.
- Encourage — rather than mandate — complementary approaches, including parent engagement and age-appropriate instruction in digital self-regulation.

This is not an argument against boundaries. It is an argument against oversimplifying a complex developmental issue into a single statewide mandate.

Thank you for your time and for your service to Kansas students and families.

Respectfully,

Chris Huff

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Education

NAME: Kelly Johnson

TITLE: Parent

EMAIL ADDRESS: Kelly_Zita@hotmail.com

BILL NUMBER: Bill SB 302

PROPONENT, OPPONENT, or NEUTRAL: Opponent

ORAL or WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY: Written

DATE OF HEARING: January 15, 2026

Chair Erickson & Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my opposition to Kansas Senate Bill 302.

Decisions about student cell phone use and device storage are best made at the local school district level, not mandated by the State. School districts differ widely in size, building design, staffing, and student needs. Local administrators and school boards are far better positioned to determine policies that work for their specific communities.

Mandating device storage creates significant logistical challenges for many schools. Secure storage requires physical space, staffing oversight, and clear procedures to prevent loss, theft, or damage. For schools that were not designed with this purpose in mind, these requirements are neither simple nor inexpensive.

Additionally, SB 302 effectively creates an unfunded mandate. Requiring districts to provide secure device storage without corresponding funding shifts costs onto local taxpayers or already-strained school budgets. Those resources would be better spent on instruction, student support services, and classroom needs.

Most school districts already have policies in place addressing cell phone use, and many continue to refine them based on experience and community feedback. Preserving local control allows districts to respond flexibly and responsibly without imposing a one-size-fits-all solution.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to oppose SB 302 and allow school districts to retain authority over these decisions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kelly Johnson
Gardner, KS

Diane Law
9600 El Monte St
Overland Park, KS 66207
dianekaylaw@gmail.com
660-864-4563

January 13, 2026

Senate Education Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th Avenue
Topeka, KS 66612

Dear Chair and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing as a concerned parent and active community member in the Shawnee Mission School District (SMSD) to strongly oppose Senate Bill 302 (and the similar HB 2421), which would impose a statewide "bell-to-bell" ban on personal electronic devices in Kansas schools, requiring them to be turned off and stored in an inaccessible location away from students including recess, lunch, and passing periods.

As a parent with children currently enrolled in both elementary and middle school in SMSD, I have seen firsthand how our district's existing, grade-level-differentiated cell phone policy effectively balances student safety, learning focus, and practical needs. In elementary schools, devices are silenced and stored in backpacks all day. In middle schools, they are silenced and kept in lockers, with access allowed only during passing periods. This approach minimizes distractions during core instructional time while allowing limited, supervised access when appropriate—without the need for daily collection, storage, or distribution systems. I serve as an active member of our middle school's PTA and sit on its executive board. In this role, we have solicited feedback from parents, teachers, and administrators about the current policy. The overwhelming response has been positive: there are no widespread concerns or calls for stricter measures. The policy is working well to support student engagement, reduce disruptions, and maintain a positive school environment.

I fully align with the positions of both the Kansas PTA and SMSD, which have submitted testimony in opposition to SB 302. As the Kansas PTA has emphasized, decisions about cell phone policies should remain with locally elected school boards and administrators who are directly accountable to parents, teachers, and students in their communities. This local control allows policies to be tailored to the unique needs of each district and adjusted as circumstances change—something a rigid statewide mandate would undermine.

Moreover, the bills represent an unfunded mandate on school districts. Implementing secure storage solutions (such as lockable pouches or phone lockers) across all buildings would impose significant logistical challenges and financial costs, with no additional state funding provided. These resources would be better directed toward classrooms, teacher support, or student programs rather than unnecessary overhauls to policies that are already succeeding locally.

SB 302 is unnecessary in districts like SMSD, where thoughtful, locally developed approaches are effectively addressing device use without statewide intervention. I urge the Committee to reject this bill and preserve local decision-making authority on this issue. Thank you for your consideration of my views as a parent, PTA leader, and taxpayer. I respectfully request that this testimony be included in the record for SB 302.

Sincerely,
Diane Law

January 15, 2026
Bill SB 302 Opponent

Lee Ann Mahoney- Concerned Parent of school age children in SMSD
LeeAnnMahoney86@gmail.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I'm writing to voice my opposition to bill SB 302.

There is nothing impeding the learning of children in our schools with the current cell phone policy in SMSD.

I have a greater concern for our children in school than cell phones and that is gun violence.

Your effects would be more suited for protecting our children from the leading cause of death in children. So that they have an opportunity to focus on learning and growing up to be valuable adults in society.

Please vote no on bill SB 302.

Lee Ann Mahoney
Parent of 3 children
Merriam, KS

Hello, I am Ryan Malay, and I have taught in Beloit Kansas for 21 years. In that time I have seen how cell phones have changed education, and while I believe the use of cell phones in schools is an important issue, a carpet ban is not the correct solution.

First, there are many educational uses for cell phones. I use them for several of my projects, and I know our business teacher uses them as well. There do need to be some restrictions, but a statewide ban under all circumstances takes away many opportunities for learning.

Second, I believe this should be a local issue. In Beloit students are not to have cell phones unless they are using them for a specific purpose, such as video recording for a class project, or checking stocks in personal finance, or in classes where the use of social media is part of the curriculum. This gives us the freedom to stop students from texting or being on TikTok during class, while using cell phones in ways that can be educational.

Finally, not every district can afford to give every student a quality laptop or a Chromebook. Many times in rural districts students are forbidden from using the computer in their pockets that is far superior to the school provided laptop or computer lab.

Please reconsider your stance and allow districts to make their own decisions about the best use of personal technology.

Thank you for your time,

Ryan Malay

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 14, 2026

Bill SB 302 Opponent

Rachel McCawley, MBA, parent of a SMSD student

Rachel.mccawley2@gmail.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I am writing to voice my opposition to bill SB 302. As a parent and citizen of the SMSD, I am opposing the new bill. Policies should be determined by locally elected school boards and administrators, not state legislators. This ensures local stakeholders—parents, teachers, and students—have a voice in shaping policies that work for their district and allows for policy changes as needs arise.

Also, to enact the bill, there will be logistical challenges the bill would create of securely collecting, storing, and distributing phones each day and the potential costs this could create for school districts. The bills create an unfunded mandate as they provide no additional funding for schools though the bills suggest utilizing equipment such as secure lockable pouches or a phone locker which could create a large expense when multiplied across district buildings.

Our Senate Education Committee needs to focus on providing equality to all our students and a fair and free education – not on policies that have already been successful at the school board level.

Please vote no on bill SB 302.

Rachel McCawley, MBA, parent of a SMSD student
Leawood, KS



Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 15, 2026

Bill SB 302 Opponent

Jennifer Pendleton-Parent

jpendleton@gmail.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I was shocked to see Bill SB 302 come to my attention and I'm writing to voice my complete opposition to this, as it is infuriatingly uncalled-for.

I feel this bill is unnecessary because many school districts in Kansas have recognized the issues with cell phones in schools and have worked with their **communities** on the best way to implement policies specific to their schools. It ***should not be up to legislators*** to make decisions in communities in which they do not reside, especially when parents, students and administrators are happy with the policies they have already set in place.

I'm at a loss as to why you all feel the need to implement a bill that would affect hundreds of thousands of Kansans without any input from these families. This is not common sense. I implore you to **VOTE NO ON BILL SB 302.**

Jennifer Pendleton

Parent to an 18, 16 and 12 year old

Fairway

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 15, 2026

Bill SB 302 Opponent

Mike Petersma/Parent

mpetersma@gmail.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I am writing to voice my opposition to bill SB 302.

In my opinion decisions such as these should be made at the local school district level. The local school district has a much better way of knowing their student body as well as allowing for open communication with parents. Additionally, as a parent I have raised my children to be responsible with all the SB 302.

Mike Petersma

Parent

Lenexa

Chairperson and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Mark Renfro. I am a Kansas resident, a working parent, and someone who has spent my career in the trades. I respectfully submit this written testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 302.

As a working parent, especially one employed in heavy construction, I am often on job sites where I cannot simply leave work when an issue arises. Like many Kansas families, my ability to ensure my children's safety depends on reliable, direct communication. Senate Bill 302 would unnecessarily interfere with that communication by restricting students' access to cell phones and smart devices during the school day.

Parental rights are not theoretical—they are practical. Parents are responsible for their children before, during, and after school. The ability to contact my children directly in the event of an emergency, a medical issue, or a rapidly changing situation is not a convenience; it is a necessity. It is not the role of the state or a school district to decide when a parent may or may not communicate with their own child.

We also must acknowledge the reality of school safety in America today. Active threats, lockdowns, and emergency situations are no longer rare or hypothetical. In those moments, immediate access to communication can save lives, reduce panic, and allow parents to make informed decisions. Removing or restricting that access creates risk, not safety.

While I understand concerns about classroom distractions, Kansas schools already possess the authority to manage student behavior and instructional focus. Local educators, parents, and administrators are best positioned to establish reasonable, flexible policies that reflect their community's needs. A statewide mandate removes local control and imposes a one-size-fits-all solution that does not work for working families.

Kansas has a long tradition of respecting parental authority, local decision-making, and the dignity of working people. Senate Bill 302 undermines all three.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to oppose Senate Bill 302 and to protect both parental rights and local control in Kansas schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Renfro

Prairie Village, Kansas

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 15, 2026

Bill SB 302 and HB 2421 Opponent

Beth Sanford, Parent

bethannesanford@hotmail.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I am writing to voice my opposition to bill SB 302. While I understand the desire to reduce classroom distractions, this bill sends a troubling message to children. Policies that prevent students from contacting their parents directly communicate that schools have more authority over them than their parents do and undermine their autonomy.

My child should be able to reach me directly when they feel scared, unwell, or simply need support. Schools educate children; they do not replace parental authority. Removing this ability prioritizes compliance over responsibility and disregards the developmental need for trust and independence.

Please vote no on SB 302 and HB 2421.

Beth Sanford

Parent

Shawnee, Kansas

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee
January 15, 2026

Bill SB 302 Opponent
Meaghan Schaible
Parent, SMSD 512 (1st and 6th graders)
meaghan54@gmail.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I'm writing to voice my opposition to bill SB 302.

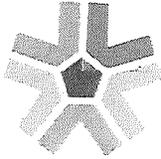
Under the current SMSD cell phone policy there is no impediment to our children's learning. This bill differs from SMSD's current cell phone policy which is differentiated by grade level. Policies should be determined by locally elected school boards and administrators, not state legislators. This ensures local stakeholders—parents, teachers, and students—have a voice in shaping policies that work for their district and allows for policy changes as needs arise.

The bill creates logistical challenges such as securely collecting, storing, and distributing phones each day and the potential costs this could create for school districts. The bill creates an unfunded mandate as they provide no additional funding for schools though the bills suggest utilizing equipment such as secure lockable pouches or a phone locker which could create a large expense when multiplied across district buildings.

In my opinion their focus would be better suited to protect our children from the number one thing that impedes their learning: Gun Violence.

Please vote no on bill SB 302.

Meaghan Schaible
Merriam, KS



SHAWNEE MISSION SCHOOL DISTRICT

Opponent Written Testimony on Senate Bill 302 Senate Education Committee

January 14, 2026

Chairperson Erickson and Members of the Committee,

As superintendent of the Shawnee Mission School District (SMSD), I am writing to submit testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 302. Our opposition stems from the need to maintain local control over aspects of public education that fall within the purview of local elected boards of education; the conflict between this proposed law and existing SMSD Board policy; a significant difference in our understanding of what constitutes “instructional time;” and our concern about the implications of this proposed law being an unfunded mandate which would impose significant costs in terms of time and financial resources on school districts.

The Shawnee Mission School District Board of Education has passed policy and developed clear guidelines for personal device use in classrooms. The process for developing policy and guidelines came from our community-developed strategic plan, and included broad community input. Participants included parents, teachers, administrators, students and community members, who devoted significant time to wrestling with the inevitable unintended consequences which would come from enacting any sweeping policy. Our Board of Education weighed the benefits and consequences of the decisions they made, and came up with a policy that works for our community. As such, we strongly believe that our policy and guidelines represent the will of our community when it comes to cell phone use in our schools.

The proposed law conflicts with existing SMSD policy in a number of important ways, in a manner which would thwart the will of this community, as expressed through the strategic planning process. Recognizing that students of different ages have different needs and levels of responsibility, our policy for electronic devices treats elementary, middle and high school students differently, allowing for a gradual increase in access and accountability, as students mature.

Our community strongly believes that elementary students do not need phones while they are in school, and our policy supports this. For secondary students, particularly ones who have responsibility for the safety and well-being of younger students, there are times during a school day when parents might want them to have access to their phone, and our policy allows this at times that do not interfere with instructional time. This is an adaptation that came from the

policy adoption process and was important to our community, and an example of why respecting local control is so important.

It is important to note that our policy has an understanding of "instructional time" which differs from the definition found in Senate Bill 302, and reflects our community's belief that there are times during the day when, for our secondary students, having access to a phone does not interfere with the time dedicated to instruction. This represents a hard-fought compromise where no one got everything they wanted, but in the end, the district came out with a policy that works for this community.

Finally, this bill contains unacknowledged costs for school districts; both the financial costs of whatever system is used to securely store electronic communication devices "...away from the student's person in an inaccessible location during instructional time..." as well as, perhaps more importantly, the costs in both time and the human resources necessary to administer such a system, which would interfere with those resources being used to support instruction. The district will always stand in opposition to mandates which place additional responsibilities on school districts without the resources necessary to meet those responsibilities.

Other districts in our area have invested significant time and resources in developing their own policies with regard to electronic devices, just as we have in Shawnee Mission. We do not see the need for the legislature to take any action which would supersede these policies, which represent the will of the communities in which they were developed. However, if the legislature feels the need to act, our district would be in support of legislation that required each district in the state to develop their own policy with regard to student access to electronic devices. This would maintain decision-making power at the local level where it belongs, while ensuring that all students would be learning in environments governed by policies that limit access to electronic devices during instructional time.

I appreciate your consideration, and would be glad to respond to any questions that you might have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Schumacher", written in a cursive style.

Dr. Michael Schumacher, Superintendent
Shawnee Mission School District
913-993-6200

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee
January 15, 2026
Bill SB 302 Opponent

Katie Schwenk, LMSW
School Social Worker in the SM district, parent of 3 children in the SM district
katieschwenk@gmail.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I'm writing to voice my opposition to bill SB 302.

I have 3 children in the Shawnee Mission District, my oldest being a 7th grader with a cell phone. Our household is very strict on phones - no social media at all for her, she can only text/call certain people. We have restricted MANY websites, & she's not allowed to have most apps. I tell you this, to show that we take this technology seriously as a family. Her phone is for communication to her family, not for anything else. The restrictions at school that the district has already put in place keeps phones out of classrooms, while allowing kids to communicate with family/friends/work that they may need to at the approved times.

Please do NOT vote for this bill to pass, as the district has done their job to keep our kids from being on their phones more than necessary. Vote No!

Thank you,
Katie Schwenk
6316 W. 55th St, Mission KS 66202
402-618-0649

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 15, 2026

Bill SB 302 Opponent

Stacy Shaw, Catholic and Public School Parent

stacyandchristophershaw@gmail.co

Chair & Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your time. I am in opposition to bill SB 302.

I trust the state and local school boards and parents to make the best decision for our schools without political demands.

Please vote no on bill SB 302.

Stacy Shaw

Stacy Shaw, Catholic and Public School Parent
Fairway, KS

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 15, 2026
Bill SB 302 Opponent
Sandra B. Sherry, parent
bsherry1030@gmail.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I'm writing to voice my opposition to bill SB 302. I agree that there should be some sort of limits set on cell phones for students during the school day, but I don't agree that a total ban is the answer for the following reasons:

- **Enforcement** - I think a total ban will be hard to enforce. Our school district has already instituted a cell phone policy which I believe is more realistic. It isn't a total ban, but places limits on cell phone usage. I believe classrooms in the same school should use similar rules during the school day such as having some sort of cubby where each student has a designated spot for the phone that is out of reach during instructional time. This puts a burden on teachers, but I think it's better than a total ban.
- **Safety** - in case of an emergency, I want to be able to reach my child and in case there is some sort of incident at school, I want them to be able to reach me.
- **Funding** – is more money going to be added to our school budgets in order to implement this ban and provide secure places for phones to be stored during the day? What equipment will be needed to safely store over 1,000 phones that can't be accessed during the day? How will that be funded?
- **Logistics** – in a high school with over 1,000 students, how will it work for them to all put their phone in a specific spot and retrieve it at the end of the day? Where will over 1,000 phones be stored safely? Are they going to be in individual lockers that can't be accessed during the day? It seems like a logistical headache to me and would add more of a burden on school administrators and staff.
- All school districts are not the same - policies should be determined by locally elected school boards and administrators, not state legislators. This ensures local stakeholders—parents, teachers, and students—have a voice in shaping policies that work for their district and allows for policy changes as needs arise.

I am all for placing limits on cell phone use during the school day and I think that is needed. But I also think it's hard and not very realistic to put the genie completely back in the bottle. I think limits are necessary without forcing a total ban.

Please vote no on bill SB 302.

Sandra B. Sherry
Prairie Village, KS 66208

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 15, 2026

Bill SB 302 Opponent

Brianna Vaughn, parent

bvaughn@ascendmedia.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I'm writing to voice my opposition to bill SB 302.

Kids don't need access to phones in classrooms, but the bell-to-bell policy is not the answer. I need for my kid to be able to have access to her phone or device throughout the day to text me in an emergency, or urgent situation. For many kids, this is crucial to their mental health to not feel isolated from their support system.

Please vote no on bill SB 302. I appreciate that limits should be set to minimize cell phone usage in school, but cutting off for the entire day is not ideal.

Brianna Vaughn
Overland Park, KS

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 15, 2026

Bill SB 302 Opponent

Jodie Vickers, parent, small business owner,
5311 W 94th Terrace Overland Park, KS 66212

Hello chair and committee members,

I have/had four children in SMSD schools, two graduated and two with 4-7 years left in public education in Kansas. I am writing to express my opposition to bill SB 302.

While I strongly believe cell phone access needs to be regulated during class/ instruction, there are far too many situations that arise in which my children specifically need or have needed access to contact me directly. For example, fire at SMS, person with a gun on campus, a student in the building with a gun, personal needs that need to be addressed when staff is dismissive. These are just a few situations.

Additionally, where do you propose the resources both staff and financial be pulled from to support this bill? There are FAR more important needs for our schools resources than Bill SB 302.

Had my children not had access to contact me, I would have been on scene to determine my child's safety, adding an extra level of strain on local law enforcement/ school resources.

Please vote no, we do not need the state to have a say in phone policy for our school districts.

Jodie Vickers
Overland Park, KS

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee

January 15, 2026

Bill SB 302 Opponent

Christopher von Rautenfeld, Ph.D., parent
djlittlemind@gmial.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I oppose bill SB 302.

Policies such as a cell phone ban in schools should be made by locally elected school boards and administrators, not state legislators.

SB 302 is too strict. It doesn't make an allowance for phone use between classes or during lunch.

SB 302 is too rigid. Elementary, middle, and high schools need policies tailored to different needs for these student bodies.

SB 302 requires cumbersome and potentially expensive implementation. The cell phone bans currently in place in USD 512, for instance, are effective without requiring devices be "securely stored away from the student's person in an inaccessible location during instructional time."

Please vote no on bill SB 302.

Christopher von Rautenfeld

Fairway, KS

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee
January 15, 2026
Bill SB 302 Opponent
Bryan Wilcox
Parent
bryan.wilcox@gmail.com

Chair & Members of the Committee,

I am writing to respectfully voice my opposition to Bill SB 302, which would impose a blanket restriction on students possessing cell phones in Kansas public schools.

While I agree that cell phones should not disrupt learning environments, restricting students from having a phone on their person raises serious safety, communication, and practical concerns, particularly during emergency situations. Schools are not isolated from real-world risks, and the ability for students to communicate during a crisis is critical. Emergencies such as school lockdowns, medical incidents, severe weather, or transportation failures often unfold rapidly, and access to a personal communication device can be lifesaving.

Research and real-world incidents have shown that during emergencies, students frequently rely on their own devices to contact parents, first responders, or emergency services when school systems are overwhelmed, delayed, or inaccessible. In several widely reported school emergencies nationwide, students' cell phones were the primary means of communicating accurate, real-time information. Removing that access does not enhance safety. It reduces it.

Additionally, modern emergency preparedness guidance increasingly recognizes personal devices as part of a layered communication strategy. Cell phones enable access to emergency alerts, location sharing, and medical information, all of which are especially important for students with health conditions or disabilities. A complete possession ban undermines these protections rather than strengthening them.

From an educational standpoint, the issue is not possession, but misuse. Schools already have effective tools to address classroom disruption: clear policies, teacher discretion, and consequences for inappropriate use. Many districts successfully manage this by requiring phones to be silenced, stored, or only used with permission during instructional time. These approaches preserve focus while still allowing students access when it truly matters.

A blanket prohibition is an overly rigid solution to a nuanced problem. It removes local control, ignores individual circumstances, and prioritizes convenience over student safety. Reasonable, enforceable classroom management policies are a better and more balanced approach than a statewide possession ban.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to oppose SB 302 and instead support policies that balance learning, safety, and responsible use.

Please vote no on Bill SB 302.

Bryan Wilcox

Prairie Village, KS

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Education

NAME: Erin Woods

TITLE: Parent & Public Education Advocate

EMAIL ADDRESS: ewoods999@gmail.com

BILL NUMBER: Bill SB 302

PROPONENT, OPPONENT, or NEUTRAL: Opponent

ORAL or WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY: Written Only

DATE OF HEARING: January 15, 2026

Chair Erickson and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my opposition to bill SB 302 as it is currently written. I'm sharing my reasons for opposition as well as some suggested improvements if the bill does move forward.

As a parent of two kids who were in school when cell phone usage among adolescents really took off, I appreciate the intent and spirit behind this legislation and agree that excessive cell phone use during the school day can be disruptive to learning and student engagement. Creating a focused, supportive learning environment is a goal we all share.

However, I oppose this bill as written for two primary reasons because it:

- Removes local control from school districts that have intimate knowledge of community needs and challenges.
- Creates significant logistical challenges and an unfunded mandate when learning time and school budgets are already stretched thin.

Local Control Is Working

Most Kansas school districts have already implemented strong and thoughtful cell phone restrictions tailored to their local needs. These policies vary appropriately based on school size, grade level, staffing capacity, and community input. Local boards, administrators, educators, and families are best positioned to determine how cell phone use should be managed in their schools.

A one-size-fits-all statewide mandate risks undermining solutions that are already working and removes flexibility from districts that may need to shift approaches or provide different approaches for elementary, middle, and high school students.

Unfunded Mandate and Logistical Challenges

This bill also presents serious logistical and financial concerns. If districts are required to securely collect, store, and return thousands of student cell phones each day, they will need to purchase equipment such as lockable storage systems, pouches, lockers, or other security solutions. Many districts will also need additional staff time to manage these systems safely and efficiently.

At the same time, Kansas schools are already absorbing a special education funding shortfall from the state. Districts are covering these costs out of general education budgets, leaving fewer resources available for classroom instruction, mental health supports, and staff retention. Adding a new, unfunded requirement places further strain on already limited resources.

Suggested Improvements and Amendments

If the Legislature wishes to move forward on this issue, I urge consideration of the following amendments:

- Preserve local control by allowing districts to adopt or maintain their own cell phone policies that meet general state guidelines rather than mandating a single statewide approach.
- Provide dedicated state funding for any required equipment, staffing, or administrative costs associated with enforcement.
- Allow flexibility for grade-level differentiation, emergency situations, medical needs, and accommodations for students with disabilities.
- Include a phased implementation timeline to allow districts time to plan, budget, and engage families and staff.

Conclusion

While I share the goal of reducing classroom distractions and supporting student learning, this bill goes too far by imposing a costly, inflexible mandate on local schools. Kansas districts are already taking this issue seriously and should be trusted to continue doing so in ways that best serve their students and communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to oppose SB 302 as written or significantly amend it to address these concerns.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Erin Woods

Opposition, Written Only Testimony on Senate Bill 302
Senate Education Committee,
January 15, 2026
Dr. Brent Yeager, Superintendent, Olathe Public Schools

Chair Erickson and Members of the Committee:

Olathe Public Schools is opposed to Senate Bill 302. Our community and elected Board are committed to addressing the broad range of issues that cellphones and social media have contributed to changing the nature of our society in general and our schools in particular. Senate Bill 302 mandates the strongest instrument to address these issues. We support regulation of phones in schools. A fully funded school finance formula, including the \$44 million annually we divert from the budget to fill the special education shortfall, and management of cellphone behavior are both required.

We do not support the proposed methods of eliminating the negative impact of cellphones in all schools. One-size fits every school district will not address the issue. The current bill includes exceptions, and more exceptions will certainly be sought, and the bill includes the exemption for non-public schools receiving public funds. Senate Bill 302 is not a comprehensive solution, and it is not a solution built on our community and parental engagement. **As ours is in Olathe.**

We support Senate Bill 302 as a framework and guide for all schools to set high and clear standards, goals, and outcomes. We support the ability of each elected school board, and non-public school governing body, to determine, within state standards, measures to mitigate the impact of cellphones and the challenges they bring to the classroom.

The Olathe Public Schools Board of Education has policies and guidance that already address the content of this bill; we prioritize local control. Our Board of Education voted on policies over a year ago that met the needs our greater community has asked for regarding cell phone usage in the classroom. Historically issues the Legislature addresses with a broad ban may not reflect the varied needs of each local school district and communities they serve. Our focus remains on the importance of serving our community's expectations with the final decisions rooted in the elected board's decisions locally.

The focus and commitment of our Board to our community is on setting and fulfilling high expectations for all our students and addressing cellphone use is a priority. Our Board focuses valuable resources on ensuring students have the opportunity to succeed and minimization of cellphone interference is critical. Our robust school improvement system holds schools accountable for academic achievement and progress, and we are accountable for addressing cellphones with the support and engagement of our community, not the mandate in Senate Bill 302.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Yeager", is positioned to the left of the contact information.

Dr. Brent Yeager, Superintendent
Olathe Public Schools
byeagerec@olatheschools.org